

## PA Pointers

### Giving the news that's fit to print

Mark Twain once said, "It is better to say nothing and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Few of us have pen names, as Twain (really Samuel Clemens) did, to accept the blame for any speculative statements we make in response to questions from the media. To avoid the pitfalls of saying something "foolish," the Air Force Research Laboratory has created a network of Public Affairs representatives to answer the questions of its members regarding interaction with the media, public relations or marketing representatives.

These representatives can assist you in determining what course of action to pursue when answering queries, locating points of contact and clearing items for release.

Here are a few points to keep in mind while dealing with the media:

- Air Force members should refer all media inquiries to a PA representative and not speak in an official capacity to the media before prior coordination with PA. Media representatives may interpret any communication between themselves and members of the Air Force as "on the record" or official information. (Technology directorate personnel should refer the media to their internal Public Affairs office, if one exists, or to the

marketing representatives who are seeking endorsements for their products or activities. For instance, if you're called by a software company for an impromptu survey about their product and how it has helped your Air Force organization, refer the caller to a PA representative. By AFI 35-206, Air Force members must not endorse commercial products, services or activities, either directly or by implication.

- Keep in mind, too, that any statements you post to Internet discussion groups or send through e-mail that include your duty title, phone number or unit (in a footer, for example) or that are sent from government systems (with e-mail return address displaying an "af.mil" extension, for example) could potentially reach a media representative. Someday, you may see a *USA Today* headline that reads: "Air Force astrophysics expert comments online about 'little green men' and their outstanding landscaping job on Mars." In any event, by AFI 33-129, Para. 6.1.6, Air Force members are prohibited from participating in "chat lines" or open forum discussion unless for official purposes and after approval by appropriate PA channels.

- Should you be the point of contact for an event that requires media coverage (newspaper, TV, radio, photographer, magazine, press releases, etc.), contact a PA representative early in the set-up process to assist you. Some events that may fall into this category are: public events involving Maj. Gen. Paul or front office personnel; any event that would showcase the AFRL in the public eye; and, outside briefings (especially at the Pentagon or outside the Air Force). PA also offers guidance on briefings, brochures, videos, newspaper articles, displays, conferences, fact sheets, etc.

The basis of journalism these days is producing headlines against daily, even hourly, deadlines. The pressure to meet these deadlines, coupled with a human nature that thirsts for an easy answer, may lead to distributing false information for the sake of supplying information quickly and easily. In order that you, as representatives of the Air Force, communicate reliable information to the public through media channels, it is important to seek the counsel of PA specialists. @

host unit or local servicing PA office. Employees of AFRL headquarters should refer media calls to Maj. Ginger Jabour, (937) 656-9876, or Leah Bryant, (937) 656-9010.)

- This also applies to calls from public relations or

